

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION AS PART OF EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE UNITED STATES

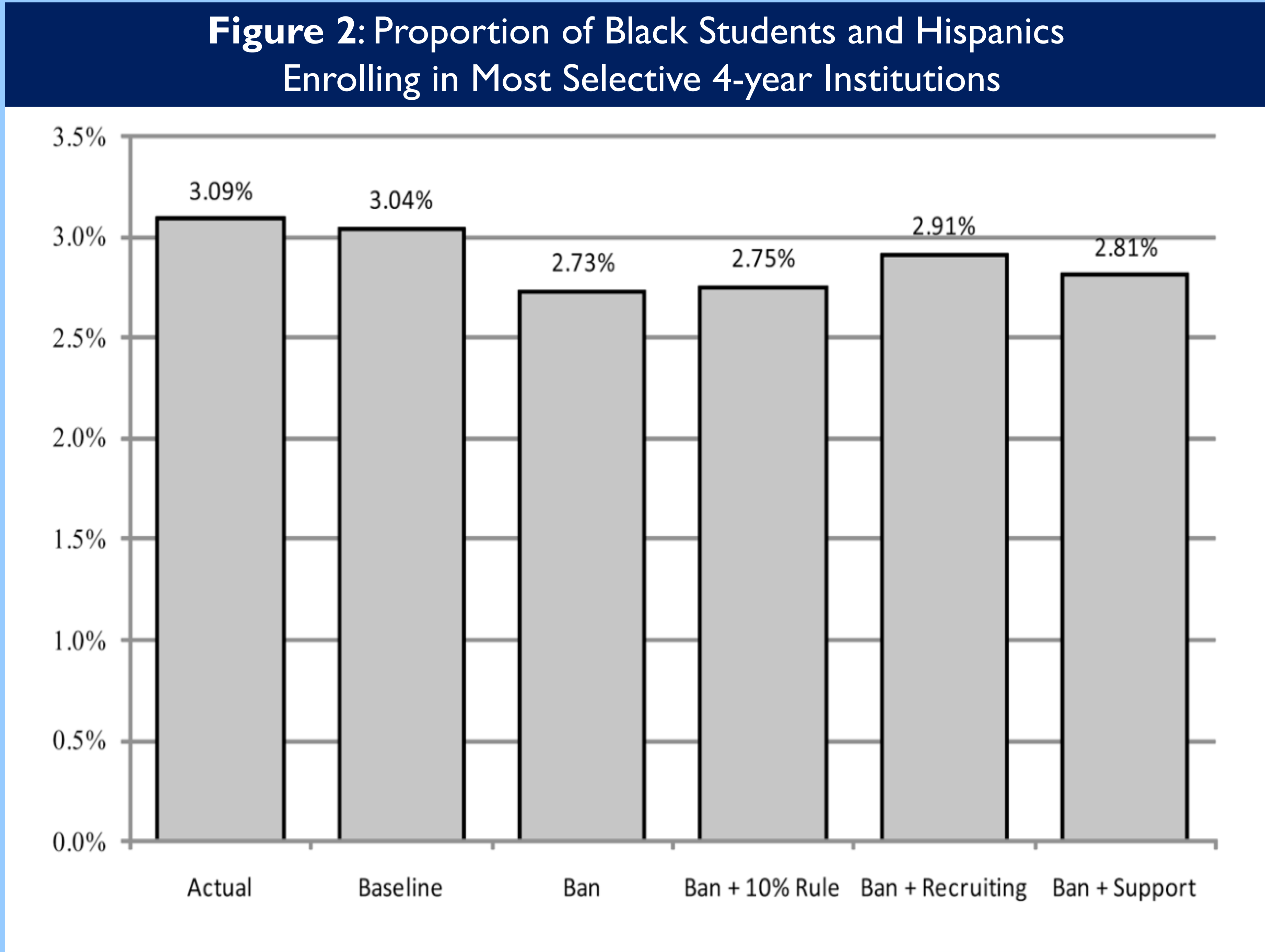
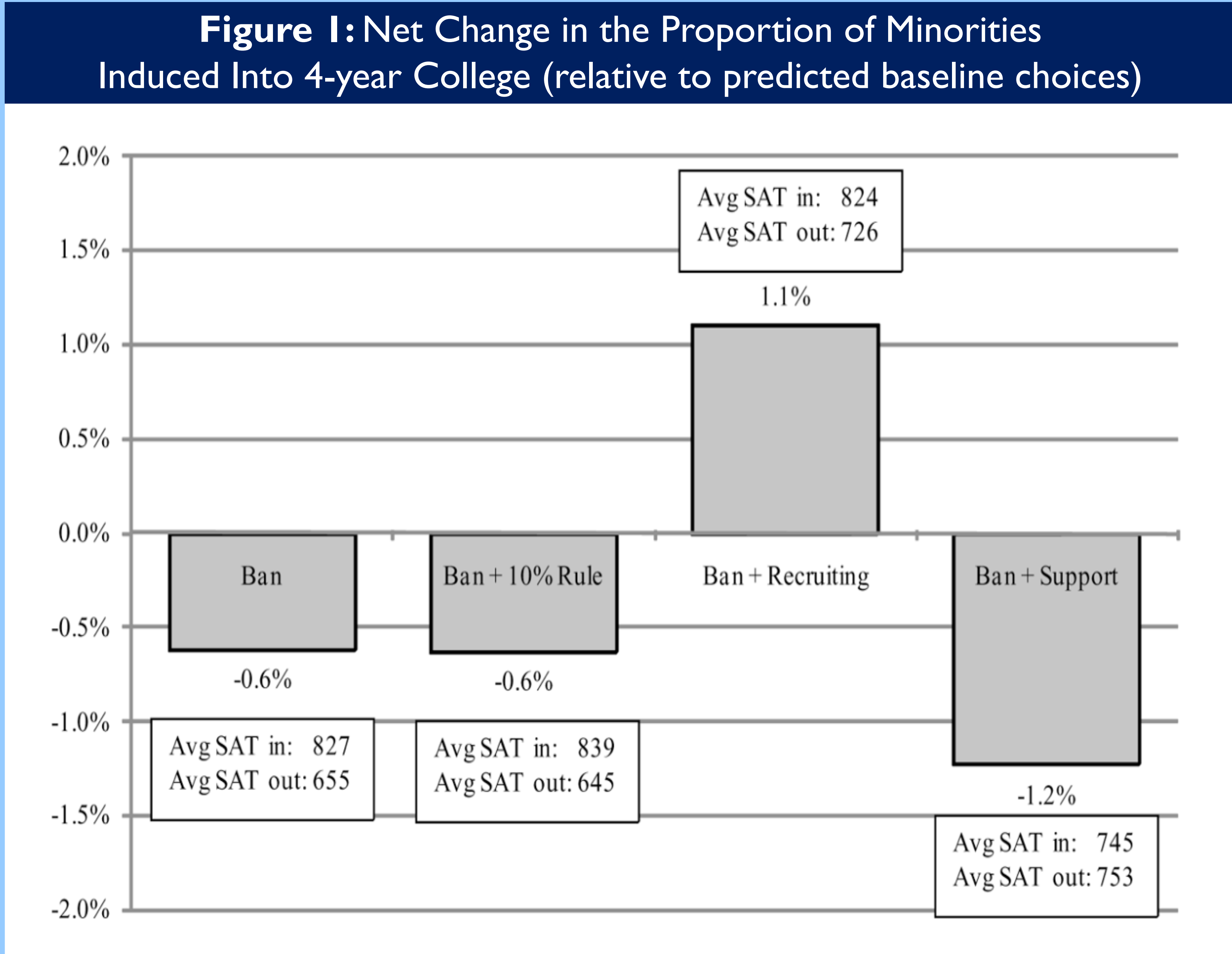
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What is Affirmative Action?

Affirmative action is defined as “efforts aimed to end discrimination and to remedy the effects of past discrimination... affirmative action is a commitment to find means of providing access to opportunities heretofore denied to certain individuals or classes of individuals (or both)” (Reed, 1983). Put simply, affirmative action policies are enacted by the U.S government to ensure that groups of people who have been historically excluded, are able to access opportunities, such as higher education, despite race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status etc.

The History Behind Affirmative Action

The first use of affirmative action was seen in 1961, when President John. F Kennedy passed Executive Order 10925 which stated that federal contractors can not discriminate against applicants on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, religion or origin. (*History of Affirmative Action: American Association for Access, Equity and Diversity*) However, almost 61 years later, have these polices achieved their intended outcome? Are these policies even necessary? This research will aim to prove that although affirmative action polices can be more effective, they do promote diversity and socioeconomic progress among minority and disenfranchised groups.



Source: Howell, J. (2010). Assessing the Impact of Eliminating Affirmative Action in Higher Education. *Journal of Labor Economics*, 28(1), 113-166. doi:10.1086/648415

❖ **Figure 1**, created by Jessica Howell, simulates the impact that the removal of affirmative action policies would have on students overall including their SAT acceptance scores.

❖ “Average SAT in” refers to students who would be enticed to apply for colleges despite the removal of affirmative action policies. “Average SAT out” refers to students who would not be attending a four year institution after high school graduation.

❖ The 10% program has the same impact as the removal of the ban due to the fact that students attending four year institutions are more than likely are already part of the top 10% of their class. (Howell, 2010)

❖ Recruitment has a positive effect on enrollment because students who are recruited feel reassured about submitting their applications to institutions. (Howell, 2010)

❖ The policy that has the most negative impact on enrollment would be support through preparatory programs and other assistance. I inferred that this is because these programs require a certain time commitment that low-income students may not have due to either familial commitments or other responsibilities.

❖ **Figure 2**, also Howell’s research, demonstrates the impact of enrollment in selective 4-instituions.

❖ Actual enrollment into these institutions were 3.09% with the minimum enrollment being 3.04%. After the ban, enrollment of Black and Hispanic students, is expected to drop by nearly 10% from the minimum. (Howell, 2010)

❖ Unlike regular four year institutions, selective institutions are expected to see a growth in Black and Hispanic students through the 10% rule, recruitment and support programs. Research suggests this is because selective institutions have the financial means to support Black and Hispanic students who come from low-income families apart from the fact that these institutions are prestigious and are able to get applications without much effort.

Policy Proposals

1. Holding academic institutions liable for who they are admitting.

❖ Wealthy students from affluent families should not be able to buy their way into institutions. However, holding institutions accountable is not enough. Parents who are robbing high achieving students without the economic means of their place at an institution must also be held liable.

2. Increase funding that goes into affirmative action programs for higher education that would ultimately allow for the expansion of opportunities to groups of people that have been historically excluded from higher education opportunities.

❖ The 2019 Fiscal budget allotted “\$59.9 billion for the Department of Education, a \$7.1 billion or 10.5 decrease from the 2017 enacted level.”(Office of Management and Budget, 2019) The reduction in the overall fiscal budget not only further strains the education system, but it does not allow for a greater range of families to receive assistance.

3. Support Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s)

❖ It should be noted that there was a decrease in funding for HBCU’s during the Trump presidency. In 2019, the Trump administration requested approximately \$642 million but in 2020 only requested approximately \$404 million, this is almost a \$238 million difference.(Office of Management and Budget, 2019-2020) This decrease in budget was yet another way to intimidate Black communities who are seeking professional development and betterment.

Impact of Affirmative Action Polices in Higher Education

❖ All in all, research into affirmative action has demonstrated that affirmative action polices are crucial in ensuring that historically excluded groups have a presence in higher education institutions, even if small.

❖ The United States government, both at a federal and local level, have a responsibility to ensure that Black, Indigenous, and other disenfranchised minorities are present and are active in higher education institutions. A higher education not only guarantees a higher income, it also means that individuals are better qualified to assume civil responsibilities. (Bowen and Bok, 1998)

❖ Even though affirmative action polices have brought opportunities to Black, Indigenous, and other disenfranchised minorities not previously seen, there are a series of problems with it. Affirmative action was intended for numerous groups of people but research suggests that very specific groups have benefitted. So, in short, affirmative action has not brought opportunities to all disadvantaged groups equally thus not fulfilling its original expectations.